

# Strategy Research Project

## TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY: THE US-ROK ALLIANCE

BY

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**USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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The United States plays a critical role in the wartime defense of the Republic of Korea. The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States (US) and the Republic of Korea (ROK), signed in 1953, committed the US to help defend South Korea against external threats. The US military maintains a military presence in the region in support of this commitment. Formed in 1978, the Combined Forces Command commander, a US General, also serves as the commander of the United Nations Command and US Forces Korea. The wartime control of all forces in South Korea currently resides with the US-led CFC. Emerging global commitments and the increasing capabilities of the ROK military led to the US and ROK agreeing to transfer the US role from supported to supporting in April 2012. A recent shift in dates was approved to December 2015 by Presidents Obama and Lee. This paper reviews the background of the US-ROK Alliance, changes in global diplomacy within the Asian region, and examines the military capabilities of the Alliance. This paper proposes policy recommendations for the US and Republic of Korea to consider as they plan to transfer wartime authority to South Korea.



## TRANSFER OF AUTHORITY: THE US-ROK ALLIANCE

The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and South Korea, signed in 1953, committed the US to help defend South Korea against external threats. The United States (US)-Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance, one of the world's strongest bilateral alliances, has successfully deterred aggression, sustained a relatively peaceful Korean peninsula, and played a significant role in promoting security and stability in Northeast Asia. Additionally, through strategic partnering with the United States, South Korea has become a global economic power and a thriving democracy with a large capable military. South Korea is also a strong economic partner of the United States with trade agreements and its participation in the Group of 20 (G-20), an organization committed to addressing global economic and financial growth, solidifies South Korea's position as a strategic economic ally of the United States.

The end of the Cold War opened up opportunities for new diplomatic and economic relations; China and Russia entered into such relationships with South Korea. The emergence of this interaction created an opportunity to stabilize the Korean Peninsula as the North and South shared interests with China and Russia. However, the North's unwillingness to participate isolated North Korea, increased tensions on the peninsula, and secluded North Korea economically. The continuing food and energy crises within North Korea exacerbated the instability on the peninsula. Additionally, North Korea continues to defy the international community by developing a nuclear weapon program and acting aggressively towards the South.

The continued instability on the peninsula due to North Korea's actions supports the continuation of the status quo in regards to the US-ROK alliance. The transfer of

authority for wartime control of ROK forces was recently delayed to 2015. The delay in changing the US role from supported to supporting provides an opportunity to examine the US-ROK Alliance, United States Forces Korea (USFK) force structure and the increasing capabilities of the ROK military to determine an acceptable course of action for the alliance. This paper reviews the background of the US-ROK Alliance, the growing capabilities of the ROK Army, diplomatic relations in Southeast Asia, and proposes policy recommendations for the US and Republic of Korea to transfer wartime authority to South Korea without modifying US commitments.

#### Background of the US-ROK Alliance and US Role

The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and the Republic of Korea, signed in 1953, committed the US to help defend South Korea against external threats. The US military maintains a military presence in the region in support of this commitment.<sup>1</sup> In 1978, the Combined Forces Command (CFC) formed to coordinate the operations of the large Korean armed forces. The CFC Commander is also the commander of the United Nations Command and US Forces Korea (USFK). In 1994, South Korea assumed peacetime control of its own military forces; however, the wartime control of all forces in South Korea currently resides with the US-led CFC.<sup>2</sup> As the Cold War ended, US troop strength started to decline as the US reviewed its forward postured forces and global commitments. In 2004, the number of Brigade Combat Teams forward stationed in Korea was reduced to one with the deployment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division from Korea to Iraq. Upon completion of its mission in Iraq, it redeployed to Fort Carson, Colorado. Although the US troop strength is considerably less than it was at the end of the Korean War, US leaders serving in Korea assert that the US commitment remains unchanged.<sup>3</sup>

USFK plays a major role in the defense of South Korea. According to General Walter L. "Skip" Sharp, the USFK Commander, its role is "to deter aggression against the ROK, defeat aggression should deterrence fail, and respond to other destabilizing conditions that could affect the ROK."<sup>4</sup> USFK is a sub-unified command of US Pacific Command and the commander USFK also serves as the commander CFC. As the commander CFC, General Sharp is responsible for commanding/coordinating the United Nations Command and commanding all subordinate service components in South Korea.<sup>5</sup> The missions of the CFC and USFK have remained relatively unchanged since inception.

The US and ROK began discussing the transition of the US role from leading to supporting in 1988 due to declining ROK public opinion about US forces, a stronger and more capable ROK military, and an increase in US requirements in other regions. Discussions in 2006 set April 2012 as the scheduled transfer from US to ROK control.<sup>6</sup> However, in the aftermath North Korea sinking of the *Cheonan* naval ship, President Obama and President Lee agreed to delay the transfer to December 2015.<sup>7</sup> The Operational Control (OPCON) transfer officially designates the ROK as the wartime headquarters. Upon OPCON transition, the Ground Combat Command (GCC) for South Korea assumes the lead role and becomes the supported headquarters and USFK transfers authority to the GCC and transforms into US Korea Command, a supporting headquarters (to the GCC) in command of all US forces stationed in the region.<sup>8</sup>

### Strategic Actors

*China.* Although some may argue that the US-ROK Alliance is the linchpin to security in the region, emerging relationships within Northeast Asia and other key allies

are just as vital as the US-ROK alliance. China and South Korea are becoming dependent upon each other. South Korea has a significant number of businesses that invest in China's economy and was a key player in China's emergence into the global market. Additionally, in 2008, the two countries began conducting a feasibility study of a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Both governments, in 2008, agreed that a ROK-China FTA would be beneficial to their respective countries. China became South Korea's largest trade partner in 2004, outrading the US and Japan.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, China's stance towards support of North Korea changed in recent years. It voted for sanctions against North Korea in 2006 and openly condemned the DPRK's nuclear program.<sup>10</sup> China, a strong regional power, is a strategic partner for unification on the Korean Peninsula and, some argue, would benefit from a unified Korea.<sup>11</sup> China's long-term relationship with North Korea and economic ties with the South make it a critical player for stability and potential unification on the Korean Peninsula. For example, President Obama recently called upon Chinese President Hu to help defuse a crisis when North Korea shelled a South Korean island.<sup>12</sup>

Although China is transforming its military, its 2008 Defense White Paper reiterates that its national defense policy is defensive in nature. It strives to build a strong military while growing into a prosperous nation. Its defense policy includes the following:<sup>13</sup>

- Upholding national security and unity
- Development of China's national defense and armed forces
- Enhancing the performance of the armed forces with information
- Implementing the military strategy of active defense

- Pursuing a self-defensive nuclear strategy
- Fostering a security environment conducive to China's peaceful development

China aspires to be a formidable military power that can defend its sovereign territory with an elite ground force and supporting Navy and Air Force.<sup>14</sup> Defusing any crisis on the Korean peninsula is critical to its economic development so it can fund the transformation of the military. China does not want to see North Korea implode, nor does it want to see war breakout on the peninsula due to a fear of thousands of North Korean refugees flooding the country.

*Japan.* The inauguration of President Lee in South Korea and the global economic crisis of 2008 renewed economic efforts between the ROK and Japan. Economic talks between the two states stalled for five years over disagreements about the lowering of agricultural goods trade barriers.<sup>15</sup> President Lee, a former businessman, understands the importance of trade agreements and the economic growth of South Korea. He pledged more economic cooperation with Japan in a January 2009 trade summit. The two countries are key economic partners; 2007 two-way trades totaled almost \$83 billion.<sup>16</sup> Although bilateral talks were renewed in 2009, more importantly a trilateral (Japan-China-ROK) cooperation secretariat was established in May 2010 to manage and promote future summit agendas and projects. The trilateral summits will address economic, environmental, security and cultural issues. Although diplomatic relations were strained because of the Japanese occupation from 1905-1945, President Lee is striving to move South Korea beyond ill feelings and towards economic progress. Japan and South Korea share mutual concerns including North Korea's threats and China's economic growth.

Japan has relied on its security relationship with the US for many years. This relationship is based upon post World War II agreements. Additionally, Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution forbids maintaining a military capable of waging war.<sup>17</sup> Japan does retain a defense force to protect its sovereign territory from invasion. Japan's defense policy is based upon four principles:<sup>18</sup>

- Support the activities of the United Nations
- Establish the foundation necessary to ensure a stable quality of life
- Progressively develop efficient national defense for self-defense
- Deal with foreign invasions of Japan in accordance with security arrangements with the US

Japan seeks partnerships with the ROK and resolution of the North Korean nuclear weapons issue through multilateral cooperation and trilateral summits with South Korea and China.

*North Korea.* Kim Jong-Il's Military-First Policy (Songun), the policy of designating the military as the nation's top priority, continues to aid North Korea in strengthening its military capability as it strives to become a strong communist nation.<sup>19</sup> This policy, established in 1995, is primarily responsible for North Korea's focus on nuclear weapons.<sup>20</sup> The emergence of North Korea's nuclear program caused significant degradation in relations with the US and its failure to comply with US demands increases the tensions between the two nations.<sup>21</sup>

In 2008, North Korea vowed to "become a strong and prosperous socialist nation by 2012."<sup>22</sup> Although North Korea has strictly adhered to its socialistic principles, its economy has experienced either decline or limited growth. It still suffers from a food

shortage and lacks other daily necessities.<sup>23</sup> According to United Nations' reports, North Korea is projected to experience a shortage of over 550,000 tons of food in the near future.<sup>24</sup> The most recent military actions by North Korea, the sinking of the *Cheonan* and shelling of a South Korean island, are believed by many to be yet another military tactic to gain diplomacy and economic aid to their country.<sup>25</sup> Other theorists believe these acts of aggression were designed to reinforce the legitimacy of Kim Jong Un, the named successor and youngest son of dictator Kim Jong-II.<sup>26</sup> North Korea recently agreed to release newly discovered US Service Member remains. It is believed that this announcement is not humanitarian in nature but somehow connected to economic aid or for North Korea's gain.<sup>27</sup>

North Korean diplomatic relations are improving with China and Russia; however, its relations with the United States and Japan are stalemated due to the North's nuclear weapons program and the release of Japanese nationals abducted by North Korea.<sup>28</sup> Although relations with South Korea improved in the early 2000s with the prospect of cooperative projects, the South Korean administration is adamant about North Korea abandoning its nuclear weapon program.<sup>29</sup>

*Russia.* Russia, a bordering state of North Korea, certainly has security and economic interests in the region. Russia's relationship with North Korea flourished during the Cold War and waned at the end of the Cold War. This was particularly evident when Russia publicly condemned North Korea's pursuit and subsequent testing of a nuclear weapon and in its support of United Nation's Security Council Resolutions against the North. Russia recently energized its diplomatic efforts with North Korea. Russia realizes that North Korea provides critical overland access to one of the world's

largest economies, South Korea. Russia's economic interests in the South change the dynamics on the Korean peninsula and may lead to Russian support of Korean unification. Russia must delicately balance its diplomatic ties with the North and economic ties with the South to prevent isolation of the DPRK.<sup>30</sup> It is in Russia's interest to maintain relations with both countries due to their mutual interest in a proposed project to connect a trans-Korean highway to the trans-Siberian highway.<sup>31</sup>

*United States.* South Korea is a key security ally in Asia for the United States. The US National Security Strategy declares South Korea as an important leader "in addressing regional and global issues, as well as in embodying and promoting our common democratic values."<sup>32</sup> The United States continues to work with allies in the region to build an alliance that capitalizes upon the strengths of its partners.<sup>33</sup> United States security objectives for the region include:

- Developing a positive security agenda for the region
- Combating the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction
- Combating terrorism
- Achieving balanced growth and human rights
- Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula

The Republic of Korea has become an important economic partner with the signing of the Republic of Korea-United States Free Trade Agreement. President Obama discussed the subject with South Korean President Lee during the November 2010 G-20 Summit and the two presidents reached a tentative agreement on December 10, 2010. The new agreement, if approved, offsets the imbalance of automobile exports between the two countries. The trade agreement potentially creates 70,000 US jobs

and is a priority for the 2011 Congress.<sup>34</sup> The Trade Agreement is scheduled for deliberation in March 2011.

Although the US is committed to realigning its forces and adjusting security roles within the region, it has no plans to reduce troop strengths in Korea any further. The US will continue to have a presence on the peninsula, although long-term plans will change the status of forces from being “forward deployed to forward stationed with family members, this change will enable forces to deploy from Korea, helping to expand the pool of available forces for global contingencies.”<sup>35</sup> The global availability of US forces stationed in South Korea negatively impacts US deterrence options on the Korean Peninsula, as contingency plans are based upon the immediately available forces forward stationed on the peninsula.

*South Korea.* Maintaining a stable and peaceful Korean peninsula is one of three major national security objectives for South Korea; the second objective is building the foundation for security and prosperity, and the third is strengthening international capability and standing. These objectives are based upon its national interests of:<sup>36</sup>

- Contribute to world peace
- Promote liberal democracy
- Become a soft power
- Enhance cooperation with the international society
- Peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula

In order to achieve these national security objectives and national interests, the Ministry of Defense established the following national defense objectives:<sup>37</sup>

- Defend the nation from external military threats and invasion

- Uphold the principle of peaceful unification
- Contribute to regional security and world peace

A critical component of the South Korean national defense objectives is a well postured military that serves the people and is prepared to respond to any threat from North Korea. Additionally, the alliance formed by the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty with the United States clearly defines a joint alliance to deter aggression on the peninsula; this “military alliance has played a pivotal role in maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.”<sup>38</sup> In August, 2008, Presidents Bush and Lee agreed to expand the alliance to include economics, politics, and culture.<sup>39</sup> The United States has since become a stronger economic partner.

The end of the Cold War coincided with anti-Americanism in South Korea. The 2002 accidental death of two Korean school girls walking home from school ignited anti-American protests across the country. Additionally, college students routinely protested every Friday outside the gates of the Yongsan Garrison in Seoul.<sup>40</sup> Although some analysts would contend the rise in anti-Americanism hinders relations between the two countries, these protests mark an increase in democratization of South Korea as they strive to determine their own destiny. A rise in anti-Americanism could result in the US pulling their forces off the peninsula and mark the removal of a potential obstacle to unification.<sup>41</sup>

### Security Force Restructure and Realignment

*United States.* Since 2003, the US and ROK have been actively involved in restructuring and realigning the security forces on the peninsula. The latest plan, called Strategic Alliance 2015, was developed in the aftermath of the North Korean sinking of

the *Cheonan* which sparked a delay in OPCON transfer to 2015.<sup>42</sup> According to Presidents Lee and Obama, the transition plan for the original date of (April 2012) was on schedule, but the two agreed to delay the transition.<sup>43</sup> The shift to 2015 may provide the two countries an opportunity to examine the transfer of control carefully and determine the future of the alliance in light of North Korea's continued defiance towards the United Nations and acts of aggression towards the South. The original date of April 2012 was agreed to by then-South Korean President Roh in 2007 in the midst of anti-Americanism on the peninsula and a restructuring effort by then-US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfield. Some believe that neither side considered the required preparations to ensure a smooth transfer of authority between the two countries.<sup>44</sup>

According to General Sharp, USFK Commander, Strategic Alliance 2015 synchronizes all efforts to achieve not only OPCON transfer but also the other efforts to transform the alliance by 2015. Other transformation efforts on the peninsula include refinement of Operations Plans, changes in force structure to improve capabilities, and the consolidation of US forces into two locations. A USFK initiative that complements the transformation of the alliance is tour normalization.<sup>45</sup> Tour normalization along with the consolidation of US forces into two locations is the final phase of the transformation of the alliance and scheduled to be complete by 2016.<sup>46</sup> Tour normalization consists of modifying current personnel policies to allow more US Service members to serve accompanied tours in Korea. The USFK Commander initiated this program by increasing the number of command sponsored tours in the short-term; the long-term goal is that US troops would all serve longer tours in Korea; two years for single Soldiers and three years for those accompanied by their families.<sup>47</sup> Tour normalization

provides the command with experienced troops who are familiar with Korea, reduces stress on military families, and eliminates high personnel turnover rates due to unaccompanied (one year) tours.<sup>48</sup>

*South Korea.* The ROK strategy of transformation continues as outlined in December 2002. South Korea assumed control of ten military missions starting in 2004 and concluding in 2008. These missions were previously controlled by the US. The last of the missions is wartime control (OPCON transfer).<sup>49</sup> A key component to the transformation strategy is the establishment of the “Alliance Military Coordination Center” to assist the ROK Chairman of Joints Chiefs of Staff and the KORCOM (USFK) Command in military coordination between the two elements. OPCON transfer is driven by four principles:<sup>50</sup>

- Maintaining the ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty
- Continuing USFK stationing and guaranteeing rapid deployment of US Forces in times of crisis
- Providing continuous US support in areas where ROK falls short in capability, such as Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)
- Maintaining combined readiness posture and deterrence capacity during the OPCON transition

USFK transferred forty US military facilities to the ROK and is scheduled to return another forty as part of the transformation and relocation. Additionally, the ROK also shares part of the financial burden for construction of new facilities to consolidate USFK into two locations.<sup>51</sup> The ROK contribution to cost sharing for 2010 equals \$664 million.<sup>52</sup>

## Military Capabilities

The ROK released a revised version of its National Defense Reform 2020 plan in 2009. The original document, released in 2005, focused on modernizing and restructuring the ROK military to posture itself to deal with future security issues and challenges.<sup>53</sup> The ROK military modernization efforts include enhancement in sensor capabilities, Command, Control, Communication, Computer and Intelligence (C4I) improvements, and long-range strike, and precision munitions enhancements.<sup>54</sup> Other key objectives of South Korea's Defense Reform include:<sup>55</sup>

- Transformation into an information and technology focused military force
- Develop strategies for a united defense system led by Korea
- Form a cadre-based military and acquire advanced forces while gradually downsizing the armed forces

Classification	Total	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force
2005	681	548	41	27	65
2009	655	522	41	27	65
2020	517	387.2	41	23.8	65
Difference	-164	-160.8	0	-3.2	0

(Unit : Thousand persons)

Figure 1

- Simplify the chain of command while downsizing the number of units

	<b>Classification</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>Target Year</b>	<b>Increase/Decrease</b>
Army	Field Army Level	3	2	-1
	Corps Level	9*	7	-2
	Division Level	44	24	-20
	Brigade Level	14	23	9
Navy	Fleet Command Level	3	5	2
	Flotilla/Defense Command	7	4	3
Marine Corps	Division	2	2	0
Air Force	Combat Command	1	2	1
	Fighter Wing	9	9	0



Figure 2

Corps level (9): Regional Corps (7), Mechanized Corps (1), Capital Defense Command. Special Operations Command is excluded

- Convert to a practical, advanced defense management system

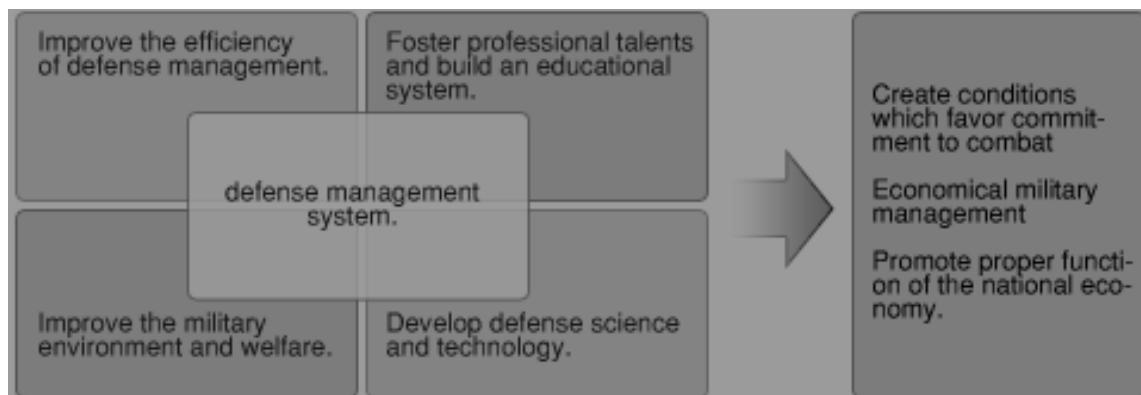


Figure 3

Although total ground force troop strength decreases by two Corps, technological advances in surveillance capability, maneuverability, and firepower allows the ROK Army will triple the operational coverage with these modernization efforts.<sup>56</sup> The recent

modifications are refinements to the overall modernization strategy South Korea has pursued over the years. Although the military forces of the South are less numerous than those of the North, these modernization efforts will enhance the warfighting capabilities of the ROK beyond those of the North. Some analysts believe the modernized South Korea could fight and win against the North without assistance from any allies.

Although North Korea's military strength is larger than South Korea's, most of the North's equipment is outdated. For example, the K1A2 Main Battle Tank (MBT) is superior to the capabilities of the DPRK's Cheonmaho. Additionally, the DPRK naval fleet consists of smaller ships (less than 100 tons) and is equipped with outdated fire control systems. Lastly, the ROK Air Force is equipped with more modern aircraft (KF-16 and F-15Ks). These aircraft are superior to the MiG-23s, MiG-29s, and SU-25s possessed by the North. The strength of the US-ROK alliance only enhances the superior capabilities the South possesses over the North.<sup>57</sup>

#### Strategic Issues Affecting the Transfer of Authority

Although the long-lasting US-ROK Alliance has successfully deterred conflict on the peninsula, the planned OPCON transfer presents some strategic issues for consideration. These issues are: concern of a lack of US commitment, peaceful reunification, and anti-American sentiment in South Korea.

##### Concern of a Lack of US commitment

USFK troop strength has declined over the years. President Nixon removed the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from Korea in 1971 and President Carter proposed the removal of all US forces from Korea in 1976. Both of these incidents sparked Korean fears of US desertion. The loss of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade Combat Team when it did not return to Korea

after its Iraq deployment in 2004 reduced the size of the force on the peninsula significantly and rekindled fears of abandonment.<sup>58</sup> The current troop strength of USFK is 28,500 with no discussions of reducing it further. According to the USFK Commander, the US commitment to the alliance remains unchanged.<sup>59</sup>

Some analysts believe that OPCON transfer to South Korea signifies a lack of US commitment or even a US withdrawal from the alliance; however, a US presence on the peninsula is required to successfully defeat the DPRK long-range missile and potential nuclear threat. The commitment of the US to the peninsula is not based upon OPCON or troop levels, it is based upon US National Security Strategy, the Mutual Defense Treaty and bilateral security agreements between the two countries.<sup>60</sup>

The transformation of USFK, currently scheduled for completion in 2016 (after OPCON transfer) establishes tour normalization for Soldiers and their families serving in Korea, as well as makes US forces serving in Korea globally available for deployments. Tour normalization reinforces the US commitment to the alliance, however, making forces globally available (also part of the plan) could be interpreted as a reduction in US commitment. Diplomatic relations can ease these fears by maintaining the force levels, maintaining exercises that bring in off-peninsula forces and affirming the military and economic relationships the two countries share.

*Peaceful Reunification.* The end of the Cold War, which saw the unification of Germany, sparked hope on the Korean peninsula for the same type of unification. In fact, the ROK published as one of its national interests the peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula. Although reunification talks have stalled with the recent crises, talks of unification during the years of US Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush

flourished as part of the South Korean administration's Sunshine Policy. The Sunshine Policy, adopted by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung and continued by President Roh Moo-Hyun, consisted of three principles:<sup>61</sup>

- Intolerance of any armed provocation hampering peace on the peninsula
- No pursuit of harm or absorption of North Korea
- Active pursuit of reconciliation and cooperation with the North

Some analysts see the United States as an obstacle to unification and others see the US as the cause of the separation. In both views, the US serves as an obstacle on the peninsula and a modification in the alliance (transfer of forces off the peninsula to Japan) could reignite unification talks.<sup>62</sup> However, the US and South Korea both agree that unification should occur after North Korea abandons its nuclear program.<sup>63</sup>

*Anti-American Sentiment.* Anti-American sentiment is largely based upon the established boundary near the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. The 38<sup>th</sup> parallel was initially used as a dividing line at the end of World War II between the US and Soviet forces. The US forces occupied Korea South of the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and the Soviets North. The Demilitarized Zone (which divides the two Koreas) is established near the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. North Korea claims that the US was responsible for the Korean War by dividing the two countries. Many South Koreans share the same view. Since the Korean War, South Korea has developed from a war torn country to a flourishing democracy. As part of its natural growth as a democracy, it has struggled for its own national identity. This struggle for identity has brought forth a degree of anti-American sentiment.<sup>64</sup> According to a Rand Corporation study released in 2004, anti-Americanism rose to a critical level in the Spring and Summer of 2002 in the aftermath of the accidental death of the two

South Korean school girls. The study also revealed that the potential causes of the anti-American sentiment are based upon a younger, more educated generation and Korea's own struggle to defend itself without assistance.<sup>65</sup>

Although spikes in anti-Americanism occur periodically, the anti-sentiments usually taper off to a manageable level. The change in the ROK administration, a much more conservative government than the previous regime, and the emergence of North Korea as a nuclear threat, acts of provocation from the North, and the perception that the North did not reciprocate the Sunshine Policy, has strengthened the alliance and bilateral relations between the US and South Korea. The expansion of the alliance beyond security (including culture, economics and politics), has eased anti-American sentiments. Statements of commitment from Presidents Obama and Lee in the aftermath of North Korean acts of aggression have played a vital role in strengthening the alliance.

### Recommendations

The US-ROK alliance is based upon more than the Mutual Defense Treaty. Since the end of the Korean war, the US and ROK have forged a bilateral relationship for mutual economic benefit and ensured security on the peninsula through deterrence. The US-ROK alliance is the linchpin in providing security within the sovereign borders of South Korea. It is imperative as both the ROK and USFK transform that they rely on all instruments of national power to achieve their national interests in the region.

*Economics First.* First and foremost, the US and ROK should continue to strengthen their economic interests in the region. The United States' economic relationships are critical to its own economic recovery as well as the financing of the ROK military transformation. There is a direct correlation between the economic

progress and military spending of South Korea. South Korea's economic relationships with Japan and China can also help defuse any security crises in the region; a security crisis in the region potentially leads to a drop in economic activity and hinders the financial progress of the three nations.

The tentative agreement between Presidents Obama and Lee to modify the Korean Free Trade Agreement is a significant milestone in the economic policies of the two countries. This agreement potentially creates jobs in a struggling US economy and strives to bring automobile exports on par with each other.

*Continue With Military Transformation.* The US and ROK should continue with plans to transform USFK and the ROK military respectively. The transformation of the ROK military is a critical step towards reducing its security dependence on the US as well as assuming control of the majority of the military facilities in the country. South Korean control of these facilities is an important achievement in the joint cooperation of the alliance and is a critical step in the consolidation of all US forces into two central hubs; the military construction required to build these two installations creates jobs and strengthens the ROK economy. The enhancements in the ROK military capabilities of a united defense system and improvements in long-range strike munitions provides capabilities on par with the US, replaces outdated equipment, and provides the necessary command and control systems and weapons to defeat North Korea.

OPCON transfer should continue on schedule. USFK and ROK forces should aggressively accomplish the required tasks to achieve OPCON transfer by 2015. The ROK forces have trained alongside US forces for almost 60 years and are certainly capable of executing a leading role in the defense of the nation. According to General

Sharp, OPCON transfer will enhance the capabilities of the alliance as it is based upon the transformation initiatives of both countries. The combined capabilities of the two countries will be able to accept any challenge and deter any threat to security on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>66</sup> The immediate threat to the North (DPRK) has not conducted large scale maneuvers in years and reports indicate it has trouble maintaining its long-range artillery arrayed along the border and other assets (Air Force, Navy, and armored vehicle fleet).<sup>67</sup> Militarily, South Korea is prepared for the responsibility; philosophically, the perception of South Korea's sovereignty (from the North) will no longer be in question. North Korea has often perceived the South as controlled by the US and OPCON transfer removes that perception. Removal of US control may create opportunities for diplomacy as the North will longer perceive the South as a subordinate to the US.<sup>68</sup> OPCON transfer allows for balance and mutual support within the alliance as the US and ROK's capabilities complement each other. The United States provides prominent Air Force and Naval power and the ROK provides the largest land component capability. The Cyber domain (a relatively new domain) capabilities will need to be determined as the Cyber warfare continues to evolve.

USFK tour normalization plans need to continue; however, the globally available policy should be changed to theater-committed force structure. Full tour normalization implementation occurs after OPCON transfer (2016). To ensure the strength of the alliance and a display of US commitment to its ally, US forces forward stationed in Korea should remain in Korea until such time as the alliance is no longer required. A US presence in the region is required as long as the DPRK is a potential nuclear and conventional threat.

*Diplomacy and Information.* Diplomatic efforts should increase before and after OPCON transfer. The Combatant and Korea Command Commander's Theater Engagement Strategy should include military to military engagements focused on a common understanding of the alliance and security assistance efforts to continue to enhance the capabilities of the ROK Army. Additionally, US Department of State efforts should continue to emphasize the importance of the Korean peninsula within the region, and our commitments to the Republic of Korea. Strategic messaging efforts should stress the balanced and mutually supporting relationship the US and ROK have established with the alliance as well as the shared capabilities. Additionally, messaging efforts should focus on the US serving as a security partner with South Korea to counter anti-American sentimentalists who perceive US forces as occupiers of their country.

### Conclusion

Bilateral relationships within the region continue to flourish. The establishment of bi and multilateral economic policies within the region continues to foster good relationships. The USFK and ROK transformation efforts are progressing and the US Secretary of Defense and ROK Minister of Defense have agreed upon a strategy-Strategic Alliance 2015. This comprehensive plan synchronizes all the transformation initiatives. It ensures that the Operations Plans for contingencies on the peninsula are rewritten based upon the modernization programs and capabilities of the alliance as well as improving the training exercises the alliance routinely conducts. Strategic Alliance 2015 enables Republic of Korea and the alliance to successfully confront future security challenges and set the conditions for lasting peace in the Korean Peninsula and in the region.

Although OPCON transfer dates have shifted based upon crises on the peninsula, the US-ROK alliance should not alter the plans for OPCON transfer in the future. Strategic Alliance 2015 is a comprehensive strategy to achieve the objectives of both the US and ROK. OPCON transfer is in the interests of both nations. This strategic shift in the wartime control of ROK forces signifies to the Northeast Asia region and the world that the Republic of Korea is reducing its dependence upon the United States and is responsible for defending its own sovereign territory.<sup>69</sup>

The continuation of the US-ROK alliance and the mutual defense of the South Korea based upon their respective capabilities will continue to deter aggression on the peninsula and strengthen security relationships in the region. As transformation continues, diplomatic, and informational efforts need to emphasize that OPCON transfer only serves to strengthen the alliance, not lessen the United States commitment to the Republic of Korea or security in the region.

## Endnotes

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